SUMMARY REPORT
ON THE THIRD
DULLAH OMAR SCHOOL
FOR PARALEGALISM

22 - 27 OCTOBER 2017

“Empowering communities for Sustainable Democracy”
Our Partners

Organising Partners

The Dullah Omar School is proudly brought to you by the Association of Community Advice Offices of South Africa (ACAOSA) in partnership with the National Alliance of the Development of Community Advice Offices (Nadcao) and the Social Change Assistance Trust (Scat).

Funding Partners

The 2017 Dullah Omar School was made possible by funding support from CS Mott Foundation and the Open Society Foundation - South Africa.
Message of Support from Dullah Omar Family

Dear ACAOSA members

Congratulations on yet another anniversary on the Dullah Omar school initiative.

The school remains a beacon of hope for communities in the midst of a dark and challenging period that South is currently experiencing. The school also serves to reinforce a value system that is based on selflessness, service and restoring dignity to the most marginalised communities hence establishing a legacy so sorely needed. That the outcome of the school’s efforts and program is to produce committed, qualified agents of change is testimony to your continued sterling efforts and commitment to making a positive social impact in communities.

We sincerely hope that paralegals will receive the recognition that they deserve for the vital role that they play in being of service to poor communities, both urban and rural. Let us further hope that the school spawns a cadre of social activists who not only serve communities in response to daily challenges, but also challenge the structural barriers to lifting communities out of poverty and despair.

Thank you for your tireless efforts and hard work! May you continue to galvanise and inspire communities in your pursuit of improving the lives of the most marginalised sectors of society.

We all need to commit ourselves to a collective movement of social activism so that we create a critical mass of progressive, caring and socially-conscious citizens.

Warm regards

The Omar family
The DOS was conceived as a learning platform for community-based paralegals in order to cultivate amongst the young generation the principles of social justice, leadership ethics and to facilitate skills necessary for mobilising and developing community agency. The formation of the school came out of the realisation that although South Africa had its independence in 1994, the structural inequalities brought about by apartheid continue to keep the majority of the population from accessing basic rights and enjoying social justice. The School trains and supports paralegals in Community Advice Offices in South Africa and ensures that learners and practitioners who prioritise working with communities, are produced. According to the Omar family:

The school remains a beacon of hope for communities in the midst of a dark and challenging period that South Africa is currently experiencing. More so, the school serves to reinforce a value system that is based on selflessness, service and restoring dignity to the most marginalised communities.

This edition of the school was special in that Community Development Workers were invited to join as testament to the vision of strengthening partnerships at grassroots level. This is in line with the pledge towards South Africa’s Open Government Partnership (OGP) Commitment 5 that seeks to contribute to the long-term development and sustainability of the Community Advice Office sector.

Two accredited and four non-accredited learning streams for paralegals were hosted from 22 - 27 October, with the intention of strengthening capacities of community-based paralegals in order to cultivate, amongst the young generations, the principles of social justice as well as build skills for developing community agency. The training streams were attended by over 125 paralegals.

Twenty-one leaders and stalwarts attended special streams that looked at strategic issues affecting the sector, country and continent at large. A total of 15 speakers and 24 facilitators graced the 2017 DOS. Speakers included, amongst others, representatives from the Department of Justice, Prof. Somadoda Fikeni and Advocate JB Skosana, ACAOSA President Mr. Albert Makwela, and Ms. Lynette Maart, the Black Sash National Director.

The Dullah Omar School has become institutionalised as the sector’s annual education and training forum and takes the lead in establishing collaborative relations with service providers for enhanced access to multi-dimensional forms of education and training for the CAO sector. There is hope that the state will make reasonable efforts to fund Community Advice Offices so that work in communities is sustainable. The importance of the African Centre of Excellence for Access to Justice (ACE-AJ) which was launched on 22 August 2017 in Kigali, Rwanda was also discussed at the DOS. The centre was established to promote African knowledge collaboration between the Judiciary and Community Justice Institutions on the African continent.
Key Recommendations

**Community organising and ownership:** Since CAOs are rooted in communities, they should not outsource their responsibility of justice in communities to a few individuals. Community disputes belong to communities and as much as possible should be handled by communities before police, magistrates intervene.

**Community engagement:** Extensive citizen-based monitoring and constant meetings in communities are important so that there is an understanding of the problems in communities.

**New generation of community activists:** As mentioned by Prof Somadoda Fikeni, in Biblical terms, the Moses generation of the likes of Oliver Tambo, Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and the likes of Dullah Omar had taken South Africa out of apartheid. What is now needed is the Joshua generation to take the country to the Promised Land and that is the task of the participants of the DOS. The participants need to answer the call of service and duty and realise that leaders emerge from communities and they therefore need to lead the fight for a better life for their communities.

**Sustainable funding models for the CAOs:** There are serious funding problems which threaten the viability of CAOs and government is urged to look at this issue as a matter of urgency if justice is to be accessible to the poor. The Sector needs a viable funding model that can address the current challenges of declining fiscal resources and increasing justice needs.

**Recognition and accreditation of Community Advice offices:** The development and institutionalisation of the sector as well as its regularisation is key. In that regard it is important that there is a strong push for the accreditation of the Dullah Omar School. All possible efforts should be made to also ensure the success of the the CAO Sector regulation process that is currently underway, as it is a critical aspect of the future sustainability of the Sector.

**Innovation and sustainability of the School:** Capacity development is an essential aspect of building a sustainable CAO Sector. Explore cost effective means of creating platforms for learning at national and provincial levels, to allow more CAO staff, volunteers and members of governance committees to benefit from dialogue, networking and training sessions.

DOS should be a School that coordinates the training of paralegals and continue to provide both accredited and non-accredited courses. DOS should continue promoting indigenous ways of learning and accessing justice. It should be a platform to show case local best practices and promote innovation. Explore options of attracting resources and support for the School.

**Traditional Courts Bill:** It is important to have a dialogue with the Community representative in NEDLAC to understand what is holding the Traditional Courts Bill and consider if ACAOSA, Nadcao, SCAT and others committed to the cause of CAOs can unlock the impasse and suggest way forward.

**Collective accountability:** There is need to build a unified voice to speak out on issues that continue to affect the Sector.
Conclusion

Extreme poverty, inequality and unemployment in communities contribute significantly to violence, insecurity and exploitation. It is important to promote a human rights culture that includes the rights of marginalised communities. It is no coincidence that there is a school named after Dullah Omar who was deeply committed to justice for communities. All stakeholders should work towards ensuring that Community Advice Offices are institutionalised and become critical spaces for ensuring justice at grassroots level. Government is committed to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and is specifically interested in tackling issues that affect the poor and marginalised communities. The Department of Justice has indicated that it is committed to good governance and an open society underpinned by values of transparency, accountability and participatory governance and emphasised the role played by CAOs in the communities.
Notes
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